

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims below as indicated:

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1 44. (Twice Amended) A method of connecting two parties in real time, the
2 method comprising:
3 providing a list of information providers to a user prior to the user submitting a
4 question, the list including an indication of whether an information provider is currently
5 available at a time the user is viewing the list, [a current availability status] and a price
6 for each information provider; [and,]
7 in response to a user selecting an information provider from the list, establishing
8 a real time voice communication connection between the information provider and the
9 user;
10 in response to a prepaid user account falling below a predetermined threshold,
11 interrupting the connection and requesting the user add to the account.

1 45. The method as described in claim 44, further comprising, after
2 establishing the real time voice communication connection between the information
3 provider and the user, changing the indication of the current availability status for the
4 information provider.

1 46. The method as described in claim 44, further comprising, after the real
2 time voice communication connection has ended, prompting the user to evaluate the
3 information provider.

1 48. The method as described in claim 44, wherein the price includes a rate
2 per period of time.

1 49. The method as described in claim 44, wherein the list includes a user
2 evaluation rating.

1 50. The method as described in claim 44, wherein the list is provided in
2 response to a keyword search.

1 51. The method as described in claim 44, wherein the list is provided in
2 response to a category selection.

1 53. The method as described in claim 44, wherein the real time
2 communication connection includes a telephone connection.

1 54. The method as described in claim 53, wherein the information provider
2 and the user each have a telephone number, and the real time voice communication
3 connection is established without disclosing the telephone number of the information
4 provider to the user and without disclosing the telephone number of the user to the
5 information provider.

1 55. The method as described in claim 44, further comprising, tracking how
2 long the real time voice communication connection is maintained between the
3 information provider and the user.

1 56. The method as described in claim 55, further comprising, billing the user
2 based upon how long the real time voice communication connection is maintained.

1 57. The method as described in claim 55, further comprising:
2 before providing the list, setting up an account for the information provider; and
3 crediting the account for an amount based upon how long the real time voice
4 communication connection is maintained.

1 58. The method as described in claim 55, further comprising:
2 before providing the list, setting up an account for the information provider; and
3 crediting the account for an amount based upon how long the real time voice
4 communication connection is maintained minus a fee.

1 59. The method as described in claim 44, further comprising, before
2 providing the list, setting up a user account for the user.

1 60. The method as described in claim 59, wherein setting up the user account
2 includes obtaining credit card information from the user.

1 61. The method as described in claim 59, further comprising:
2 tracking how long the real time voice communication connection is maintained
3 between the information provider and the user; and,
4 while the real time voice communication connection is being maintained,
5 notifying the user in real time of a balance in the user account.

1 62. The method as described in claim 59, further comprising:
2 tracking how long the real time voice communication connection is maintained
3 between the information provider and the user; and
4 deducting from the user account an amount based upon how long the real time
5 voice communication connection is maintained.

1 63. (Twice Amended) A system for connecting two parties in real time, the
2 system comprising:
3 a communications interface; and
4 a controller computer being linked with the communications interface, the
5 controller computer having:
6 a database to store information about a plurality of information providers;
7 a first logic unit linked with the database to provide a list of information
8 providers to a user prior to the user submitting a question, the list including an
9 indication of whether an information provider is currently available at a time the user is
10 viewing the list [a current availability status for each information provider]; [and]

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11 a second logic unit linked with the database to establish, in response to the user
12 selecting an information provider from the list and via the communications interface, a
13 real time voice communication connection between the user and the information
14 provider; and
15 in response to a prepaid user account of the user falling below a predetermined
16 threshold, said second logic unit interrupting the connection and requesting the user add
17 to the account.

1 64. The system as described in claim 63, wherein the controller computer
2 has a third logic unit to prompt the user to provide an evaluation of the information
3 provider after the information provider and the user the real time voice communication
4 connection has ended.

1 65. The system as described in claim 64, wherein the evaluation is stored on
2 the database.

1 66. The system as described in claim 63, wherein the first logic unit provides
2 the list of information providers in response to a keyword search.

1 67. The system as described in claim 63, wherein the first logic unit provides
2 the list of information providers in response to a category selection.

1 68. The system as described in claim 63, wherein the second logic unit
2 changes the indication of the current availability status for the information provider
3 after the real time voice communication connection between the user and the
4 information provider has been established.

1 70. The system as described in claim 63, wherein the second logic unit
2 establishes a telephone connection between the user and the information provider.

1 71. The system as described in claim 70, wherein the information provider
2 and the user each have a telephone number, and the second logic unit establishes the
3 telephone connection without disclosing the telephone number of the information
4 provider to the user and without disclosing the telephone number of the user to the
5 information provider.

1 72. The system as described in claim 63, wherein the controller computer
2 has a third logic unit to track how long the real time voice communication connection is
3 maintained between the user and the information provider.

1 73. The system as described in claim 72, wherein the controller computer
2 has a fourth logic unit to bill the user based upon how long the real time voice
3 communication connection is maintained.

1 74. The system as described in claim 72, wherein the database further stores
2 information about an account set up for the information provider, and the controller
3 computer has a fourth logic unit linked with the database to credit the account for an
4 amount based upon how long the real time voice communication connection is
5 maintained.

1 75. The system as described in claim 72, wherein the database further stores
2 information about an account set up for the information provider, and the controller
3 computer has a fourth logic unit linked with the database to credit the account for an
4 amount based upon how long the real time voice communication connection is
5 maintained minus a fee.

1 76. The system as described in claim 63, wherein the database stores
2 information about a user account set up for the user.

1 77. The system as described in claim 76, wherein the information about the
2 user account includes credit card information obtained from the user.

1 78. The system as described in claim 76, wherein the controller computer
2 has:

3 a third logic unit to track how long the real time voice communication
4 connection is maintained between the user and the information provider; and

5 a fourth logic unit linked with the database to notify the user in real time of a
6 balance in the user account.

1 79. The system as described in claim 76, wherein the controller computer
2 has:

3 a third logic unit to track how long the real time voice communication
4 connection is maintained between the user and the information provider; and

5 a fourth logic unit linked with the database to deduct from the user account an
6 amount based upon how long the real time communication connection is maintained.

1 80. (Twice Amended) A computer-readable medium having stored thereon
2 instructions which, when executed by a computer, cause the computer to:

3 providing a list of information providers to a user prior to the user submitting a
4 question, the list including an indication of whether an information provider is currently
5 available at a time the user is viewing the list, [a current availability status] and a price
6 for each information provider; [and,]

7 in response to a user selecting an information provider from the list, establishing
8 a real time voice communication connection between the information provider and the
9 user;

10 in response to a prepaid user account falling below a predetermined threshold,
11 interrupting the connection and requesting the user add to the account.

1 81. The computer-readable medium as described in claim 80, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to change the indication of the
3 current availability status for the information provider after the real time voice
4 communication connection is established.

1 82. The computer-readable medium as described in claim 80, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to prompt the user to evaluate the
3 information provider after the information provider has finished communicating with
4 the user.

1 83. The computer-readable medium as described in claim 80, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to track how long the real time
3 voice communication connection is maintained between the information provider and
4 the user.

1 84. The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to bill the user based upon how long
3 the real time voice communication connection is maintained.

1 85. The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to:
3 set up a user account for the user; and

4 notify the user in real time of a balance in the user account while the real time
5 voice communication connection is being maintained.

1 86. The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to:
3 set up a user account for the user; and
4 deduct from the user account an amount based upon how long the real time
5 voice communication connection is maintained.

1 87. The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to:
3 set-up an account for the information provider; and
4 credit the account for an amount based upon how long the real time voice
5 communication connection is maintained.

1 88. The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to:
3 set-up an account for the information provider; and
4 credit the account for an amount based upon how long the real time voice
5 communication connection is maintained minus a fee.

1 90. The computer-readable medium as described in claim 80, wherein the
2 instructions stored thereon cause the computer to establish a telephone connection in
3 response to the user selecting the information provider.

1 91. The computer-readable medium as described in claim 90, wherein the
2 information provider and the user each have a telephone number, and instructions stored
3 on the computer-readable medium cause the computer to establish the telephone
4 connection without disclosing the telephone number of the information provider to the
5 user and without disclosing the telephone number of the user to the information
6 provider.

1 92. The method as described in claim 53, wherein establishing the telephone
2 connection comprises:
3 a first telephone link with the information provider;
4 establishing a second telephone link with the user after the first telephone link
5 has been established; and
6 connecting the first and the second telephone links to establish the telephone
7 connection between the user and the information provider.

1 97. The system as described in claim 70 wherein the second logic unit
2 further comprises:
3 a first logic sub-unit to establish a first telephone link with the information
4 provider via the communications interface;

5 a second logic sub-unit to establish a second telephone link with the user via the
6 communications interface after the first telephone link with the information provider
7 has been established; and

8 a third logic sub-unit to connect the first and second telephone links to establish
9 the telephone connection between the user and the information provider.

1 104. The computer-readable medium as described in claim 90, having stored
2 thereon instructions to cause the computer to establish the telephone connection by:

3 establishing a first telephone link with the information provider;

4 establishing a second telephone link with the user after the first telephone link
5 has been established; and

6 connecting the first and the second telephone link to establish the telephone
7 connection between the user and the information provider.

1 105. (New) A method of connecting two parties in real time, the method
2 comprising:

3 providing a list of information providers to a user prior to the user submitting a
4 question, the list including an indication of whether an information provider is currently
5 available at a time the user is viewing the list, and a price for each information provider;

6 in response to a user selecting an information provider from the list, establishing
7 a real time voice communication connection between the information provider and the
8 user; and

9 updating a current availability status of an information provider in response to a
10 direction received via a telephone connection.

1 106. (New) A method of connecting two parties in real time, the method
2 comprising:

3 providing a list of information providers to a user prior to the user submitting a
4 question, the list including an indication of whether an information provider is currently
5 available at a time the user is viewing the list, and a price for each information provider;
6 in response to a user selecting an information provider from the list, establishing
7 a real time voice communication connection between the information provider and the
8 user; and

9 updating a current availability status of an information provider in response to a
10 direction received via a computer network connection.

1 107. (New) The method of connecting two parties in real time, wherein the
2 updating the current availability status of the information provider in response to the
3 direction received via the computer network connection, includes the information
4 providing selecting an availability hyperlink provided on a web page.

1 108. (New) A method of connecting two parties in real time, the method
2 comprising:

3 providing a list of information providers to a user prior to the user submitting a
4 question, the list including an indication of whether an information provider is currently
5 available at a time the user is viewing the list, and a price for each information provider;
6 in response to a user selecting an information provider from the list, establishing
7 a real time voice communication connection between the information provider and the
8 user; and
9 in response to a failure to connect with the user, providing a message to the
10 information provider indicating the failure to connect with the user, and automatically
11 updating the current availability status of the information provider to indicate the
12 information provider is currently available.